

SYNOPSIS

BEATRICE DI TENDA

'Melodramma Serio' in two Acts

Music by Vincenzo Bellini

Text by Felice Romani

First Performance at Teatro La Fenice, Venice, March 16th 1833

The Castle of Binasco, near Milan. 1418.

Beatrice Lascaris di Tenda is widow to former ruler and Condottieri Facino Cane. After his death, she married Filippo Maria Visconti, making him Duke of Milan and conferring on him her wealth, property, and political influence.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A courtyard of the Castle of Binasco

Filippo attends a party, but leaves early and encounters his courtiers. He describes his boredom and frustration with his marriage, and his insecurity in the face of his wife Beatrice's power and influence. His courtiers urge him to use his position as Duke to find a new lover, and warn him that Beatrice's followers may plot against him if she is not dealt with.

Filippo hears music and singing from afar. It is Agnese, who sings of the supremacy of love ('**Ah! Non pensar che pieno**'), and Filippo is enchanted, although Agnese loves Orombello and waits for him by night. Filippo sings of his love for her ('**O divina Agnese! Come t'adoro e quanto**'), and his courtiers urge him to take action, before all leave.

Scene 2

Agnese's rooms

Agnese sings of her lover, and awaits the arrival of Orombello, to whom she has sent a note anonymously ('**Silenzio – E notte intorno**'). Orombello is drawn to the sounds of the music, but he his heart is set on Beatrice, to Agnese's disappointment and bitterness. He speaks of a love letter, which Agnese assumes to be hers, but it transpires it is one he himself wrote to Beatrice. She realises she has a love rival and is furious with Orombello ('**La sua vita? Ma la sola, ohime!**'), despite his attempts to make her understand his feelings. He tries to protect Beatrice's honour but Agnese is vitriolic.

Scene 3

A secret grove in the palace garden

Beatrice enters one of her secret places in the castle, seemingly nonchalant, with her maids and ladies-in-waiting. Beatrice despairs of Filippo's tyrannical regime and feels guilty at helping him come to power (**'Ma la sola, oimè! son io, / che penar per lui si veda?'**). As she walks off, Filippo sees her in the distance, accompanied by Agnese's scheming brother Rizzardo, and imagines that Beatrice is avoiding him. He then confronts her with an accusation of infidelity as Rizzardo fetches her back. He then admits his jealousy of her power and confronts her again with apparent proof of her political treachery: documents that show her support for the disaffected subjects. She stands accused of both infidelity and insurrection. Her vehement protestations of her innocence, demand for respect, and appeals to Filippo fall on deaf ears (**'Se amar non puoi, rispettimi'**).

Scene 4

A remote part of the Castle of Binasco. On one side a statue of Facino Cane.

Filippo's soldiers search for Orombello, and comment on Filippo's confusing and unpredictable behaviour, resolving to watch him closely. Beatrice enters with a portrait of her dead husband Facino Cane (**'Il mio dolore, e l'ira... inutile ira'**). Despairing, she pleads with Facino's spirit, speaking of her abandonment, isolation, and fear. Orombello appears to tell her that he has assembled soldiers ready to overthrow Filippo's regime and restore her to power. She spurns his offer because she feels she cannot trust him; Orombello describes how his compassion for her plight turned to love, and he refuses to leave. As he explains this Agnese and Filippo enter, accusing them of treachery. Beatrice feels that this shame is punishment for her overhasty marriage to the corrupt Filippo; Orombello tries to persuade the duke of her innocence. The guards are summoned and Beatrice and Orombello are led away to await trial.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

A Gallery in the castle readied for a tribunal. Guards stand watch.

A trial has been prepared. Beatrice's maids tell the courtiers and guards of Orombello's torture, and the confession of guilt his torturers have extracted from him. Anichino, Orombello's friend, pleads on Beatrice's behalf to the assembled court. Agnese appears to relish her moment of revenge, but also is troubled. Filippo makes his case to the judges, and Beatrice is brought in, protesting the legitimacy of the court; she is then told Orombello has betrayed her, as he is brought in, and turns her ire towards him. He begs her for forgiveness and protests that what he said under torture was untrue, proclaiming her innocence. Beatrice forgives him.

Filippo is moved by what he sees, but quickly discards his feelings of pity, and presses onwards (**'In quegli atti, in quegli accenti / V'ha poter ch'io dir non posso'**). Agnese is remorseful. He announces that the sentence of death shall be delayed but is overruled by the court, who insist on more torture until they reach the truth, to which Filippo agrees. Agnese pleads on behalf of Orombello and Beatrice, admitting that she has defamed them, and insisting the charges be

dropped, as they are lead away to the cells. Filippo, afraid of looking weak, presses on regardless and ignores her pleas; she is ordered to leave.

Filippo admits to his terror and wonders about his lack of remorse for his actions. Anichino appears to tell him that Beatrice has not confessed under torture. Filippo describes his conflicted feelings about condemning the couple, both wishing to appear strong, but also remembers the kindness Beatrice had shown him and the joy they once shared (**'Qui mi accolse oppresso, errante, / Qui dié fine a mie sventure'**).

He acts decisively to declare to all present that Beatrice will not be executed, but the courtiers announce that troops loyal to the old regime are ready to attack the city and destroy his regime. He signs the death warrant and tries to justify himself to the people, claiming that Beatrice has brought this upon herself and is a traitor.

Scene 2

An entrance hall above the castle dungeons. Beatrice's women emerge from the cells. Guards everywhere.

Beatrice awaits execution as her attendant ladies lament her punishment. She prays, attesting that she admitted nothing when tortured (**'Nulla diss'io...Di sovrumana forza / Mi armava il cielo... Io nulla dissi, oh, gioja'**). Agnese, consumed by guilt, enters and admits to Beatrice that it was her machinations behind the plot, because of her jealousy and love for Orombello. She forgives Agnese. Orombello's voice is heard from another cell, forgiving Agnese too. As Agnese leaves Beatrice pronounces that she is prepared for death; Anichino and her ladies lament, as Beatrice declares her death a triumph and transfiguration rather than a defeat (**'Deh! se un'urna è a me concessa / Senza un fior non la lasciate'**). She is led away to execution.